

BARZAKH

The Cosmic Horror Trilogy

By Reyhan Onto

Dedicated to No One · The Business of Being Loved · Rainbow Girl: Order of Decay

Genre: Cosmic Horror / Thriller / Science Fiction / Disturbing

About The Author

Reyan Onto is a Bangladeshi singer, songwriter, producer, and author. Despite spending much of his life battling panic disorder, he has remained a relentlessly creative force. He has self-published three cosmic horror books through the Internet Archive: *Dedicated to No One*, *The Business of Being Loved*, and his latest, *Rainbow Girl: Order of Decay*. As a musician, performing under the artist name Reyan The Rebel, he released the album *The Story of My Death*. In a country where creativity is often undervalued, Reyan continues to push boundaries and dedicate himself to his art.

In 2023, he became a scholarship holder and the winner of the NAS Academy Creator Accelerator Program (June Batch). Over the years, he has also worked as a freelance video editor for various YouTube channels, blending his creativity across multiple forms of expression. His journey is one of persistence, creativity, and quiet rebellion — an artist who keeps creating, even when the world tells him not to.

Disclaimer: This trilogy is a work of complete fiction. Names, characters, places, events, and incidents are products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, real events, or locales is purely coincidental.

■ ■ Book I of III ■ ■

Dedicated to No One

By Reyhan Onto

Chapter 1

The Face of Death

I am staring at a corpse. They say this is the body of my father. Yet... I feel nothing. It's as if something is missing. I can see the body clearly, but I sense no presence of the man I once called my father.

Someone whispered, "Ariyan, stop looking at him. Go to your family for now." So, I turned away.

On the way back home, a realization sank in: the living organism lying there no longer carried the essence of my father. Perhaps it was because his soul had already left that body. Or... maybe it was because we were never truly close in the first place.

I tried to rewind my memories, searching for moments of happiness I had shared with him — but I found none. He had always been a businessman, gone from home for months at a time. And when he returned, it was usually with a weary, defeated look on his face, forcing a smile as he saw me. I understand now — he smiled to hide the pain of another failed venture, another dream collapsing.

No amount of counseling or psychiatric help could ever save a man who is losing money. Yes, it sounds harsh, and many would disagree. But the truth is undeniable — once you begin to run out of money, society will whisper devilish words about you.

They will say you were never meant for success, that failure was always your destiny. And no matter how tightly we cover our ears, no matter how hard we try to move forward, those words always find a way to reach us — like poison slipping

through the cracks.

And once you reach rock bottom, the thoughts of suicide creep in. You begin to tell yourself that the world would be better off if you had never been born.

The man I once called Father chose that path. He ended his life by hanging from a ceiling fan. I still remember coming home from school, opening the door to his room, and finding the corpse. My body froze; I couldn't make a sound. I had seen death before — but this was different. This time, it was a man I knew, who had decided to leave the world on his own terms.

And yet, as the days passed, people began to forget him. That's the cruel truth: even though we like to believe our lives will leave a mark on the world, our stories fade quickly. We are only one of thousands, and the world does not stop — or suffer — when a single story ends too soon.

The sun keeps rising and falling. The moonlight shines. People go to work. People grow old. They make plans, they fail at their plans, they curse God for their misfortune — and then they move on. All the while, they never stop to think about the corpse buried beneath the mud... something we humans choose to call a grave.

It's sad, but it's the truth: the world keeps turning without you.

[End of Chapter 1]

Chapter 2

My Demon Has a Name

Ariyan... that was the name they called me by. But I often wondered — was it the name of my soul, or just my body?

For as long as I can remember, I have felt a presence walking beside me wherever I go. It listens to every thought that drifts through my head, as if my mind were never truly my own. At times, it tries to hurt me — but perhaps it has not yet grown strong enough to succeed.

I gave this presence a name. I called it Knull.

In school, I always sat alone. I could never connect with the other kids. Perhaps it was because I had nothing in common with them.

Their world was bright and colorful. Their greatest struggle was always with their lovers. They knew nothing of the face of death.

Sometimes they called me immature because I refused to follow in their footsteps. But to me, it was the opposite. I saw no meaning in their desperate quest to hold their relationships together. One way or another, one of them would lose interest. Or they would betray each other. And even if they married, death would come for one first, leaving the other behind — alone, clinging to fading memories, like a bird trapped in a cage.

Oftentimes, we went to school alone. We sat alone, watching the clock tick slowly, while the people around us filled the air with the nonsense of their lives. There was a couple always holding hands in my school. We could not understand these creatures.

Everything this world had to offer bored us.

One morning, we arrived at school earlier than usual. We sat on the bench, eyes locked on the clock. But the more we stared, the slower it seemed to move — each second dragging like a cruel trick.

Then, something strange happened.

Knull's hands wrapped around my throat. I couldn't breathe. I tried to pull in oxygen, desperate for that familiar rush into my lungs — but nothing came. Again and again, I tried, but the air betrayed me. My arms turned numb and cold. My body burned as if it were on fire. My heart slammed against my chest so violently I thought it might burst out. My vision blurred.

Is this it? I thought. Is this the end of my life? I always knew I would die young... but to die this young — what a worthless tragedy.

A voice cut through the chaos. A teacher, yelling from afar: "Hey kids, quit screwing around!"

Through the haze, I saw him. Summoning every ounce of strength left in me, I forced out a scream: "Help me!"

The teacher rushed back with two glasses of water. But when he came close, I saw the shock in his eyes. Maybe he was spooked by the sight of me — trembling, broken, unrecognizable.

I tried to drink the water, but my throat refused it. I grabbed the teacher's arm, screaming and crying, desperate for someone to understand. But I didn't know what was wrong with me. The suffering felt endless, like an eternity unfolding inside me.

Then I looked at the clock. Only five minutes had passed.

By the time my mother came rushing to the school, my mind and body had already returned to normal — as if nothing had ever happened. I didn't go to school for a week. The doctors thought it might be a panic attack. They put me on medication.

At home, I felt safe. I spent my days playing video games, reading comic books, and watching anime. Time moved at a normal pace there. I felt joy. I felt safe in my own skin.

But after a week, I had to return to that place humans called "school." The moment I walked in, I felt their eyes on me — staring as if I were a corpse. Few bothered to speak to me. I was an outcast, untouchable.

But then, one boy approached. He sat at my bench and asked softly if I was okay. He handed me two pieces of bread. I knew this boy. He was bullied constantly. He had some form of autism, though at the time I didn't understand what that truly meant.

And yet — despite his own suffering — he chose kindness. He chose to reach out. He told us his name. It was "David."

[End of Chapter 2]

Chapter 3

The Hollow Obsession

David told us that I was often looking at a girl from the classroom. She was pretty. She had long hair. Her smile was like watching the sunrise after a long night.

David whispered, "Instead of just staring, maybe you should talk to her. Who knows? She might be kinder than you think."

I carried his advice like a fragile secret. On my birthday, I finally gathered the courage. My hands trembled, my voice almost cracked, but I stood in front of her.

Before I could say a word, she smiled and said, "Happy birthday." For a moment, I thought I had misheard. I asked, "Wait... how did you know it was my birthday?" She laughed softly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. "It's crazy, but... we're birthday twins."

My world stopped. In a life where every surprise had been cruel, here was a surprise that felt like a gift. For once, the universe didn't feel like it was laughing at me — it felt like it was gently reaching out, saying, 'You're not alone.'

Over the next few days, I found myself looking for her, trying to strike up conversations whenever I could. And every time I did, it felt like the entire class was staring at me — judging, shocked, perhaps amazed at how I was changing. And the worst part? I kinda... liked it.

After a while, David leaned over and said, "You should really tell her how you feel. You know... propose or something." I laughed at him. "Propose? Are you kidding me? I don't want to look like a clown. Giving flowers, getting down on my knees..."

that's not me."

Then David said, "Look, time on this earth is short. You should really try to enjoy life — feel the sunshine, take risks, just live. Sometimes all it takes is one step to make life worth living."

I thought about it for a moment and finally said, "Alright... I'll do it. But only after I finish the upcoming final exam." David laughed, shook my hand, and together we said, "Deal."

[End of Chapter 3]

Chapter 4

Death in the Shadow of Desire

The finals were over, and it was finally time to do what I had promised David. I bought flowers and set off to see her. I looked around for David, but he wasn't there. At the school gate, I saw him leaving. I didn't think much of it and continued on my way.

Then I saw her. She was kissing a man, her eyes shining with pride as she whispered, "Darling, I came out at the top of my class with flying colors."

In that instant, everything crashed down. She wasn't in love with me. She had only ever thought of me as a friend. Perhaps she had taken pity on me, trying to cheer me up — but nothing more. I dropped the flowers and walked back home, feeling time pass strangely fast. The world moved on around me, but my heart had stopped.

It was 12:00 AM when my phone rang. I answered, expecting David's voice — but it wasn't him. It was his mother. What I heard next turned my heart into stone. She told me David was gone. He had jumped in front of a train. He had taken his own life.

His grades had been slipping for a while. No matter how hard he tried, he could never achieve the results he wanted. And in the finals... he had failed, and the school had expelled him. She said he hated the school — the bullying, the whispers, the cruelty of people who never gave him a chance. But he had always spoken highly of me. He considered me his only friend.

I went to the funeral. The bullies were there too. Strangely, they were the ones crying the most.

As I looked down at David's body, I saw his eyes, lifeless, staring back at me. I remembered my father and the same question formed in my mind: "Why don't I feel anything? Is it because this corpse has no life in it... or was the David I knew only the soul of this body?"

It was a bright, sunny day, without a single cloud in the sky. And yet... it was raining.

A few days later, the school held a graduation ceremony. The humans there were happy. I noticed an empty seat — surely it was meant for David. But he was gone. I realized I had no friends here, except Knull. And Knull wasn't really a friend — it was an imaginary presence.

Knull told me to leave. We have no one here. I got up and left the school. Suddenly, my vision blurred. The world spun. Then blackness.

When I opened my eyes, I saw a scene that shook me to my core. Fire burned people alive. Screams tore through the air as skin melted and lives were ripped apart. I looked at my hands — they were covered in blood. I screamed, every ounce of power in my body, and... Then, I was back in school.

I looked around and saw Knull. His smile was devilish, horrifying. The skin on his mouth tore, blood pouring down as the grin widened. He lunged at me. I screamed for help. The same teacher appeared and stopped the attack.

When the episode ended, a person approached me, placing a hand on my shoulder. "Don't worry," the voice said. I looked up. And I whispered, trembling — "David?"

[End of Chapter 4]

Chapter 5

The Hours We Borrow

David looked at me and said, "You look like you just saw a ghost... haha." I froze for a few moments. "I... I didn't realize you knew my name," David said.

Then a thought struck me. Maybe this is what people call *déjà vu*, I thought. I asked him softly, "Are you... okay? Is something wrong?" David laughed and shook his head. "Dude... I'm not the one who just had a panic attack. You idiot."

I realized that even if this was just *déjà vu*, I had another chance — to make things right with my friend. I was not the only character in this godforsaken world. I was not the only one with problems. I needed to care for my friends more, because all of them had their stories.

My mom came to the school, but this time I told her, "I'm fine. It's just a panic attack — it happens. I'm back to normal. You don't have to worry, go back to your work. I have important classes today; I don't want to miss them."

David looked at me and said, "Dude... if I had the chance to miss school, I would've taken it." I told David, "My house is boring. I have more fun here at school." (I lied.)

I spent the entire day talking with David. He lived far from the school and usually came on foot, since his parents were always struggling with money. He had two little sisters, both healthy and doing well in school. David told me he tried to study, but he couldn't remember a lot of things, no matter how hard he tried. I sensed it had something to do with his autism.

I told David, "Don't worry, we'll study together. I don't really have much to do at school anyway." David smiled slightly.

Suddenly, someone shoved a school bag over David's back and started attacking him. It was the bullies. I didn't hesitate. I stood up, grabbed one of them by the head, and slammed him onto the bench. The bully fainted. His friends quickly grabbed him and poured water over his face. A few minutes later, he woke up.

Saifur — the boss of the bullies — stepped forward, his face twisted in anger. "You're lucky you're such a sick kid. If you were anyone else, I'd have killed you after school. Consider this your final warning."

When they finally left, David ran up to me, eyes wide with excitement. "Dude... that was awesome! You're like a real-life superhero!"

I rubbed the back of my neck. "Sorry, I don't know what got into me. I just... I can't stand seeing someone being bullied, especially a kid like you." David grinned. "Speaking of being a superhero... I saw you looking at Joana a lot. Are you thinking of making her your 'Mary Jane,' Spider-Man?"

I realized Joana was the name of the girl I had a crush on. In that moment, it hit me — I had missed out on so much in school. I hardly knew anyone. I had an imaginary friend... and one real friend I barely knew. This classroom was full of children with names, stories, dreams. And I had ignored every single one of them.

The next day at school, the teacher asked, "Is anyone interested in joining the science fair?" Without hesitation, I stood up. "Me! David and I — we're going to make a video game!"

I invited David and Saifur to my house and pitched the idea of a general knowledge quiz game. "The game will start at a medium difficulty," I explained. "But if a player gets a question wrong, the music will switch to something intense, and the questions will get much harder. If they lose three answers in a row, the game ends."

Saifur, despite being a bully, was actually a talented student. "I'll get you a few sets of questions with different difficulty levels by tomorrow." David chimed in, "I'm pretty good with music — I can make a few tracks with different vibes for each difficulty." I nodded. "Perfect. Then I'll handle the coding and visuals. Alright, boys... let's rock!" All of us shouted in unison: "Hell yeah!"

We decided to name ourselves "The Knightmares". The school wasn't too thrilled with the idea. But David confidently said, "Sir, we're wolves in sheep's clothing. This is a way to catch the judges by surprise." The headmaster burst out laughing and, surprisingly, accepted it.

[End of Chapter 5]

Chapter 6

Moments That Matter

The science fair finally began. David, Saifur, and I made our way to the venue, carrying our gear. David had brought his laptop, but it had a major issue — it would randomly turn off and restart. We worried that if the judges arrived, we might not even be able to show our project.

Saifur shook his head. "This laptop is as shitty as you, David. Couldn't you have brought a broken calculator instead to run the game?" David didn't miss a beat. "The only broken calculator I know of is you."

We called the school, and the teachers told us to wait — they had just the thing for us. Right before the science fair started, the school and our entire class came to check on us. The teacher handed us a high-quality laptop to use. With it, we were finally able to showcase our game.

Soon, the entire class was playing. A huge line formed, and students from other schools, curious about the commotion, started lining up to try it as well. David and I looked at each other in disbelief. "Dude! We're gonna win!"

Joana came by and smiled at me. "I played your game. I'm really impressed at how talented you are." David and Saifur walked up right behind her. "Well," David said with a grin, "we couldn't have done anything without our handsome and single friend, Ariyan."

Then Joana's boyfriend appeared and extended his hand. "Hey, you must be that talented guy Joana keeps talking about. I'm Basim, her boyfriend." Joana smiled and said, "Yes! This right here is my other half." I managed a small smile and told

Basim, "You're a lucky guy."

After they walked away, I ran to the bathroom and let the tears fall. Both Saifur and David chased after me. David shook his head, "Dude! We've got a science fair to win. You can't just cry over a girl right now!" Saifur added, "Yeah man, talk about it later. Rejection... it makes a man stronger!"

Then the judges arrived. They seemed genuinely impressed with our project, but in the end, we didn't win anything. "It's a good plan," they said, "but the game is fairly simple to make."

After the judges left, Saifur clapped me on the back. "It was never about winning. It was about making memories and having a good time. And I, for one, will remember this moment for the rest of my life." David chimed in with a grin, "I agree, Shitty Saifur!" We all laughed, and in that moment, I realized something important: the real victory wasn't a trophy — it was the bond we'd built, the laughter, and the second chance we had to be there for each other.

[End of Chapter 6]

Chapter 7

Crossroads of Fate

The finals were upon us. We had only a month to prepare. David, Saifur, Joana, and I started studying together at school. Even though Joana was meant for someone else, David and Saifur told me, "Until school ends, just enjoy the moments with her." I took their advice, and we all became really good friends... best friends, if that word still meant anything.

Tutoring David, however, was no easy task. His autism made it difficult for him to remember things, so we had to get creative. We came up with cheat codes — memory tricks to help him retain information. In accounting, I said: "Think of ALED — Assets, Liabilities, Equity, Debits. Assets increase → Debit. Liabilities increase → Credit. Equity increases → Credit. Expenses increase → Debit. Revenue/Income increases → Credit. So whenever you're confused, just shout: 'ALED rules the school!'" David laughed and said, "Okay... ALED, got it!"

The finals were over. I ran to see the results. Funny thing — usually I'm only worried about myself, but this time I was worried about David. And... unfortunately, he didn't pass. I went straight to him and asked, "Hey... you feeling suicidal or anything?" He laughed. "Hahaha, no. The principal might give me a chance because of my condition, so don't worry."

I asked if I could accompany him home. He shook his head. "No, I like long walks alone. It's weird, but it kind of makes me feel alive. Anyway, you should check up on Joana. Seems she and her boyfriend are having some breakup issues. Now's your chance, boy! Go for it!"

I tried to walk away from David, but when I saw him leaving, I ran after him. Even though he said he was fine, I was terrified. I didn't want him to die.

And then — Knull appeared at the school gate. My imaginary friend. Only this time, he looked different. Gone was the devilish grin. Instead, his eyes were wet, his face broken, as though he had been crying. "Get out of my way," I told him. But his response froze me in place.

"You have passed the test. You did everything a human should do — you helped others, even when there was no benefit for you. I'm afraid... this is the end of your test."

"Cut the bullshit!" I shouted. "Let me go after David!"

"You should listen to Knull, Ariyan." I spun around. My stomach dropped. Saifur stood there. "What the hell...? You can see him?" My voice cracked.

Saifur's face was pale, almost hollow. "Yeah. Some of us knew you weren't just talking to yourself. At first we thought you were crazy, but after reaching the second timeline, we realized... the entity was real. You'd ask for two cups of water, two pieces of bread — like someone was eating with you. You even started saying 'we' instead of 'I'."

My chest tightened. "What are you talking about? What test? What the hell is going on?" Saifur's eyes filled with tears. He shook his head, whispering, "Ariyan... thank you for all you did for us. But this is where it ends. You were amazing."

And then I saw them. The entire class was standing behind him. Their faces streaked with tears. Their voices trembling as one: "We've been dead for a long time."

[End of Chapter 7]

Chapter 8

The Living Among Dead

I woke up in a hospital bed, my head heavy and the air thick with antiseptic. A small TV was playing in the corner of the room. A documentary was running — something about trains. The narrator's voice was calm, but the words struck me like knives.

It spoke about how countless people had died walking along rail lines, never hearing the train horns that blared behind them. Scientists believed it wasn't always suicide, but something else — how sound waves sometimes bent away, leaving the doomed deaf to their own end. A thought tore through my chest. David. All this time, everyone said he chose to die. But what if he didn't? What if the world itself silenced the warning?

My mother looked at me with eyes swollen from tears. The moment she saw me awake, she collapsed onto my chest, holding me as if she would never let go. "Oh, my sweet Ariyan," she sobbed. "I've been waiting a year for this day... a whole year. You're finally back. You're alive. Thank the Almighty!" Her words froze me. A year?

"You've been in a coma, Ariyan. Since the graduation ceremony... since the crash." The crash. The school. My friends. David. Saifur. Joana. The memories came flooding back, too vivid to dismiss as dreams — yet too broken to make sense.

She whispered the words as if saying them out loud would break me further. "After the graduation ceremony... a plane crashed. It fell directly on the school. Everyone was killed — burned alive. Every student, every friend you had... gone. Except you.

Somehow, by some miracle, you survived."

All of them. Dead. Everyone! My mind fractured. Which timeline was real? Was it the one where I wasted my life staring at clocks, lost in panic and isolation? Or was it the one where I fought back, reached out, and made friends — where I laughed, where we dreamed together, even if only for a moment?

I turned my head and froze. On the bedside table was a photograph. It was me, Saifur, and David, standing shoulder to shoulder at the science fair. David was grinning wide, his arm slung across my shoulder. Saifur had his usual cocky smirk. And I was smiling too. The picture was real. The memories were real. They had always been real.

Maybe the timelines weren't separate at all. Maybe they were both me. The one who wasted everything — and the one who fought to change. Maybe this was life's cruel way of showing me that even the smallest choices, even the smallest kindness, could change the meaning of everything. But then came the question that burned me the most: Why was I the one who survived?

After the hospital released me, I visited every single one of their graves. I prayed for them. This time, I didn't ask myself whether these rotting corpses were the ones I was looking for — or whether it was their souls. I just stood there, in front of their graves, thinking about the happy moments I shared with them. About how, in some small way, I made everyone's lives — including mine — worth living.

It's true. People die. There are countless graves in the graveyards. I don't recognize most of them, but every single one had a story. And every story matters. Because a person always leaves an effect on other people's lives — whether good or bad.

Even if a hundred years from now no one remembers me, my struggles, or my stories, it doesn't matter. For now, I am alive. And in me live the memories of all my friends who were lost. Wherever I go, part of them will always remain with me.

After that day, I stopped seeing Knull. As if he never existed. My story is just one of thousands, and the world will not suffer if it ends too soon. But that doesn't make life meaningless. People who die become part of someone else. And in time, even those memories fade... but that doesn't make the world meaningless. Their memories linger, shaping lives, leaving traces. And then, after a few hundred years, even they become no one.

This story is dedicated to no one.

This story is dedicated to... everyone who ever mattered, even if only for a moment.

[The End]

A Tribute to a Lost Soul Named “Shoron”

They vanish, like whispers carried on the wind, leaving only echoes in the water, laughter, poses of a bloom. Remembered before the beginning. This is a tribute. To hands we couldn't hold, to futures unwritten, to friendships forged in fleeting moments and forever held in the heart's quiet chambers. For those who remember. For every star lost too soon, this is for the star that still shines brightly in our night sky.

■ ■ Book II of III ■ ■

The Business of Being Loved

By Reyhan Onto

Chapter 1

The Economics of Attraction

People like to pretend that love is pure. That it's a feeling, a spark, some poetic accident of the universe. But I learned early — love works a lot like business.

No girl falls for a man who earns nothing. Not anymore.

Give a man a luxurious job and suddenly he becomes attractive — handsome, even. The same face, the same body, the same voice... yet a promotion can turn him into someone worth chasing. And the moment he loses that job? The moment he slips a little in the ladder we call society? He becomes invisible. Unwanted. Ugly.

I've never seen a woman chase a man for who he is. I've seen them chase jobs. Chase salaries. Chase the promise of a better lifestyle. They don't fall in love with the man — they fall in love with the opportunities that come with him. And whether anyone admits it or not, women become pets to economies. Loyal to comfort. Loyal to stability. Loyal to the idea of a safe future.

Of course, not every woman is like that. My father used to tell me love was different in his time. He swore that people used to choose hearts over wallets. He would tell me stories of how he met my mother — how they simply liked each other, how they married despite having almost nothing, how the world criticized them but they didn't care. That was their time. This is mine.

Now, if you want women to fall in love with you, you have to pretend you don't care. You have to work yourself to the bone, earn money, stack millions, build your empire. Only then do they turn their heads. Only then do you become someone worth noticing.

I learned this the hard way. Back in university, the women I liked never liked me back. My father was never wealthy. I topped my classes, scored higher than everyone, became the kid teachers loved bragging about.

But none of that mattered. Education doesn't matter. Talent doesn't matter. Everyone says you just need skills and a good mindset, but that's all podcast garbage. Out here, jobs come from referrals. Connections. Family. Luck. And I had none of that.

I've seen people who don't even know how to turn on a computer walk into high-salary positions because they knew someone. I've watched women swoon over these men, calling them handsome, treating them like anime heroes, worshipping them only because their wallets were heavy. Meanwhile, I stayed behind. Graduating with top scores, yet unable to land a single job. Eventually, I ended up helping my father with his work.

What does he do? My father has spent his whole life working at a graveyard. I grew up among tombstones, watching people get buried — strangers, children, victims, dreamers... and eventually, my own mother. She died of blood cancer when I was too young to understand what dying meant. Sometimes I wonder if things would've been different if we had money. Would she still be alive? Would treatment have saved her? Would life have been kinder? But wondering changes nothing. I couldn't save her. And that guilt... It stayed with me for twenty-five years.

Now I'm almost twenty-eight. My name is Rifat, and in the grand market of the 21st century, I'm nothing more than a broke, lonely, "ugly" boy trying to survive a world where love is business and business is everything.

I also tried business. Selling things. Building something of my own. But luck has never been on my side. Politics, corruption, the collapsing economy, COVID... every force in the world seemed to rise against me. I spent money I didn't have on advertisements that reached no one. Every attempt at building a future only dug me deeper into debt. So I did what I always feared — I continued working at the graveyard.

My father was getting older, and I knew, sooner or later, I would become his replacement. Days blurred into each other: digging, burying, wiping sweat from my face, earning barely enough to survive. In a graveyard, even time feels dead.

Sometimes, we had to bury new bodies over old forgotten graves. If no one visited a grave for years — if a life had been erased from memory — we simply layered the dead on top of the dead. Most of the time, we found nothing below the soil. But there were days we uncovered skulls, ribs, shattered bones... things that haunt a normal person. Not me. Not anymore.

One evening, I was told to bury an old man. No relatives, no mourners. Just a body wrapped in cloth and handed to me like garbage. "Bury him anywhere," the men said, tossing a small bundle of money into my palm. I dug the pit. The soil was dry and stubborn. As my shovel hit something solid, I thought it was just another bone from centuries ago. But it wasn't a bone. It was paper. A rolled piece of parchment, tightly sealed.

The parchment felt ancient. Decayed. The kind of thing that shouldn't survive underground. I pocketed it, buried the old man, and took the scroll back to the small shed we used for tools. When I unrolled it, a strange smell of dust and age hit me. The ink was faded but legible — handwritten in a language that felt old but familiar.

The first line froze me:

"Finally, someone is reading this. Read carefully. There is treasure waiting for you."

My heart skipped. Treasure? In a graveyard? Was someone messing with me? Was my father testing me? But the scroll continued — this was one of five scrolls hidden beneath this land. Complete them all. You will be rewarded.

The writer claimed to have lived during the medieval age — almost a century ago. A king, or something close to it. A man with wealth, servants, lovers... a man worshipped in his era. I scoffed, at first. But then I remembered: this graveyard was ancient. Older than the city. Older than the families who owned the land now.

Maybe — just maybe — someone really had buried something here centuries ago.

The scroll told me to find the grave of a man named Yamin. It even had a map — an awful sketch that somehow resembled the graveyard I had worked in my whole life. So I followed it. Eventually, I found a grave labeled with the names of a mother and child — victims of an accident twenty years ago. Their grave was untouched, unvisited, neglected. At midnight, I returned with a shovel.

I dug through the soil until I reached their coffins. If Yamin was buried here centuries ago, his remains would be deeper. So I kept digging. One hour. Two hours. Sweat dripping, hands numb. Then my shovel hit something round. A skull. And inside the skull — glimmering even in the darkness — was gold. Real gold. Old coins, heavy and bright, untouched by time. My breath froze. My hands shook. This wasn't a prank. Someone had buried this intentionally.

Inside the skull was another scroll. The second one. My mind raced — fear, curiosity, greed — all tangled into one. I held the skull in one hand, the scroll in the other, and for the first time in my miserable life... It felt like fate was talking to me.

[End of Chapter 1]

Chapter 2

The Rich Man's Bride

When I think back to my university days, there is one name that still claws at my chest — "Subha".

Subha... She was beautiful in a way that made entire hallways pause for a second. Not the kind of beauty that needed makeup or filters — she just existed differently, like she belonged in a better world than ours. I liked her. I liked her far more than I should have. And for years, I tried to be around her — talk to her, smile at her, help her when she needed something.

But the more my friends teased, the more Subha turned into someone I didn't recognize. One afternoon she came storming toward me, eyes sharp, voice trembling with anger. "Why is your friend talking about us, as if I like you? Why are people taking pictures when I talk to you? Why are you telling them things?"

I froze. My mouth went dry. I told her, again and again, "Subha, I didn't tell anyone to disturb you. They're just my friends. They're idiots sometimes, but it's not me." She didn't care. Her voice only got louder, sharper, cutting into me like a blade.

And then one day, I found out why everything suddenly made sense: She had a boyfriend. A rich one. A guy with wealthy parents, a nice job, the kind of man who could afford to take her to rooftop dinners, buy her expensive perfumes, take her abroad on holidays — things I could never even dream of. For Subha, I realized, I was never even an option. Not even by accident.

I looked at how relationships worked around me. My friends messaged 20 girls — one replied. Girls got 20 messages — they picked the richest guy. Then they told

their friends, "I didn't choose him for the money." And everyone pretended to believe it. Romantic dinners. Trips abroad. Five-star photos for Instagram. Women loved to say it was about "feelings," but I knew the truth. They fell in love with lifestyles, not with faces. I never had a lifestyle to offer. Just a heart. And hearts are worthless in the economy of love.

Years passed. University ended. Life got heavier. Then, earlier tonight — after finding that ancient scroll and the gold coins inside a skull — my phone rang. It was one of my old friends. "Rifat... did you hear? Subha is getting married. A big ceremony. The guy's filthy rich." I kept my voice calm. I said something meaningless — "Oh, good for her" — and hung up.

But when the call ended, I looked at myself in the mirror of the graveyard shed. My reflection looked like a stranger. A man covered in grave dirt, sweat, loneliness, and years of being unwanted. And I felt something burn inside me. Not love. Not sadness. Unfairness.

Why wasn't I good enough? Why did my background decide my fate? Why did poverty decide whom I was allowed to love? It felt like the whole world was collapsing inside my chest.

So I did something I never thought I'd do. I took the gold coins — the ones from the skull — and sold them. The money I got... it was more than I had ever held in my entire life. And then something clicked inside me. Something dangerous. Something hopeful. Something desperate.

If there are more scrolls... If there is more treasure... If I collect everything this ancient king left behind... maybe — just maybe — I can build a business, an empire... and finally buy the life I was denied. Maybe I could even buy the heart I was never allowed to have. Maybe I could earn enough to make Subha regret ever ignoring me. And just like that... my obsession with the scrolls began.

I unrolled the second scroll slowly. It told the story of Yamin — the very man whose skull I had been holding moments ago. Yamin had once served as a royal

guard under King Garius. He was utterly loyal... the kind of man who followed orders even when they tore him apart from the inside. One passage described the day the king commanded Yamin to kill his own brother. His brother had apparently been caught stealing something valuable from the palace. And Yamin — bound by duty — executed his own blood with his bare hands.

But even perfect soldiers can have flaws. According to the scroll, the king grew uneasy with Yamin over one particular habit — Yamin was obsessed with reading. He collected books from every corner of the kingdom, spending nearly all his earnings on ancient texts, histories, philosophies. He built an entire private library — his "collection of knowledge." He studied civilizations, religions, the rise and fall of men. And with every page he read, something inside him grew sharper, clearer, more aware. And that was exactly what the king feared.

One day, King Garius arrived at Yamin's library with a group of soldiers. Without warning, they began burning everything — every book, every scroll, every piece of knowledge Yamin had gathered. When Yamin saw the smoke, he rushed to the scene in panic. He begged the king to stop. "Please, my king — knowledge is eternal. You must not destroy it." But the king only grew angrier.

"These are lies," he said. "Distractions. Poison meant to drag your loyalty away from me. You are a soldier — nothing more." Yamin didn't back down. He stood between the flames and the soldiers, desperate. "My king... if you burn my books, it will be the same as killing me." The king laughed. "Then so be it." And before Yamin could react, the king drew his sword and beheaded him.

At the very end of the scroll, a final message was written in faded ink: *"If you seek more wealth... find my greatest soldier. His name is Maruf."*

[End of Chapter 2]

Chapter 3

The Message From Beyond The Grave

The scrolls also revealed the location of Maruf. I spent hours tracing the faint lines on the ancient map, trying to make sense of its strange markings. Eventually, I understood. Maruf was buried at the far corner of the graveyard — so far back that most people never even walked there. When I reached the place, I froze. There was a grave already there... and it carried my father's name. Javed.

But ambition has a way of silencing fear. My mind was still full of Subha, full of wealth, full of the fantasy of rewriting my fate. I didn't think. I didn't hesitate. I grabbed the shovel and began to dig.

I dug until my hands burned. I dug until the soil turned heavy and hollow beneath me. Finally, the metal of the shovel struck wood. A coffin. I pried it open — and instead of treasure, I found a letter resting beside the corpse. It was written by the dead man's son.

"Dear Father, I'm sorry I couldn't be enough for you."

I stared at it, completely baffled. Who writes a letter and sends it to a grave? Who apologizes to a corpse? I shook my head, shoved the letter aside, and gently pushed the body out of the way. I wasn't there for sentiment. I was there for wealth. For power. For Subha.

Deeper beneath that coffin, my shovel struck something again — another coffin. This one was different. It was dark, almost blackened, and cracked open as if time itself had tried to destroy it. Inside, the body was wrapped in black cloth. Maruf's bones were brittle, dull, practically dissolving when I touched them. But something

else caught my attention — his skull. There was a deep opening carved into his forehead, as if someone had pierced him with a blade.

And then I opened his jaw. Inside his skull's mouth lay another scroll — small, cracked, unnerving. Beside the body, half-buried in the remains, was a golden lamp. Heavy. Ancient. Worth far more than what I had taken from Yamin's grave. I didn't know what it was, but I knew it meant money.

Maruf. The name itself carried the weight of violence. According to the scroll, Maruf was not just one of King Garius's soldiers — he was the hand of death that the king unleashed upon the world. Where Yamin had been loyal yet human, Maruf was something else entirely. He was loyalty stripped of conscience, a beast wrapped in armor. The scroll described him as "the man without mercy."

Unlike Yamin, Maruf found pleasure in war. He lived for it. He thrived in it. Invading foreign kingdoms became his sport. Entire villages burned beneath his command. He slaughtered men by the hundreds, cut down children without hesitation, and burned homes with the laughter of a man who believed he was doing the world a favor.

Whenever a village fell, Maruf gathered all the surviving women — mothers, daughters, widows — and brought them back to the capital. He built a fortress that the writer described as "the house of his wives," though it was nothing more than a vast prison. Every woman he captured, he called his bride. Every tear, every scream, he silenced with the delusion that he was saving them.

Even King Garius found amusement in Maruf's twisted logic. "The beast believes himself a savior," the king once said, laughing as fires burned in the distance. "What a fine kind of monster I've created."

But Maruf's reign of terror did not last forever. The scroll spoke of one woman — Eliza. She was not like the others. She did not bow. She did not cry. And she did not break. Eliza had watched her husband die by Maruf's hand. She had seen her child fall lifeless beside him. And yet, when she was thrown into Maruf's fortress, she did

not surrender. She stared at him with the kind of hatred that could outlive centuries.

One night, as Maruf removed his armor and tried to have his way with her, Eliza acted. From his own chestplate, she pulled a dagger — his dagger — and drove it straight into his forehead. The blade split his skull where the mark of arrogance had always been. The scroll said that Maruf didn't scream. He just smiled — a faint, broken smile — as if he finally understood something at the edge of death. He died believing he had done nothing wrong.

But Eliza didn't stay to watch him decay. She escaped. She slipped through the cracks of his empire, gathered the remnants of the ruined villages, and built something new — an army of women who had nothing left to lose. And thus began the whispers of Eliza's Rebellion — a storm born from blood and vengeance.

At the end of the scroll, written in trembling ink, were the final words: *"If you seek more than gold, seek Eliza. She is where the dead still weep."*

[End of Chapter 3]

Chapter 4

Eliza's Grave

There Rifat stood — sweat dripping from his forehead, mud clinging to his boots — staring at the massive tree that towered over Eliza's grave. Its roots curled into the earth like veins protecting a buried secret.

He sighed, gripping his chainsaw. Why does it always have to be this hard? he thought bitterly. "All this gold, and now I have to chop down a damn tree," he muttered. Without hesitation, the engine roared to life, and the blade tore into the bark. Woodchips scattered like ash in the air, and the sound echoed across the quiet graveyard.

When the last fragment of the trunk crashed onto the ground, Rifat began digging — deeper and deeper, his shovel biting through the damp soil. His thoughts drifted as he worked. Why did Eliza return here? She could've escaped — lived a peaceful life somewhere far away. But no. She came back to fight, to lead a rebellion against King Garius. Rifat couldn't decide if she was brave or foolish. Still, he felt something close to admiration. Maybe some people are just born to burn for something bigger than themselves, he thought.

He was almost through the roots when a voice cut through the silence. "Rifat... what the hell are you doing?" He froze. Slowly, he turned around. His father stood behind him, eyes wide with disbelief.

Moments later, they were both inside the office. The old ceiling fan creaked above as his father's voice thundered across the room. "Have you gone mad? Digging up graves now? The neighbors are complaining — they say they hear noises at night!

Sounds of digging, screaming, demons! Rifat, what is happening to you?"

Rifat clenched his fists. "Father, listen. I found gold — a lot of it. It was buried in the graves. Look!" He opened a cloth bag, revealing glimmering coins and ornaments. His father's eyes widened. "Where did you get this?"

"I told you — from the graves. I found a century-old scroll, and it led me to more scrolls. Each one led to more treasure. These stories... they were all real." His father frowned. "Do you even hear yourself? These are centuries-old legends, Rifat. How could you even read those scrolls? They wouldn't be in our language. This doesn't make any sense."

Rifat shook his head. "If you don't believe me, here — see for yourself." He handed over the ancient scrolls. His father unrolled them carefully, squinting under the dim light. Then his expression changed. "Rifat..." his father whispered, voice trembling. "There's nothing written on these."

Rifat's heart sank. "What are you talking about? Look—" He snatched one of the scrolls back. But as his eyes scanned the parchment, his blood ran cold. The ink was gone. Every line, every word, every trace of the story had vanished. The scrolls were blank.

Rifat's breath trembled as he stared at the blank scrolls. Then anger replaced confusion. "Well," he said, his voice cracking, "it doesn't matter if the scrolls are blank or not. The gold is real, right?" He stepped closer to his father, eyes burning. "I'm actually finding real money — gold that can change our lives! Why can't you just be proud of me for once? Why are you always disappointed in me? Why am I never good enough for you, huh?"

His father, Javed, opened his mouth to speak — but no words came. His face twisted in pain. He stumbled backward, clutching his chest. "F-Father?" Javed's fingers dug into his shirt, his breath short and sharp. "R-Rifat..." was all he managed to say before collapsing onto the cold floor.

"Father!" Rifat shouted, dropping to his knees. He shook him, panic rising like fire in his throat. "Father! Stay with me! Please!" He grabbed his phone, called for an ambulance, and somehow managed to carry his father out to the street. The sirens screamed through the night. But deep down, Rifat already knew.

At the hospital, a doctor stepped out, his expression heavy. "I'm sorry," he said quietly. "Your father was gone before you even got here. It happens sometimes... at his age, the heart just gives out. Maybe it was simply his time." The words hit Rifat like stones.

The next day passed in a blur. Relatives came and went — some offering words of comfort, others whispering behind his back. But when it came time to bury Javed, Rifat made a single request. "I appreciate everyone's concern," he said softly. "But... I want to do this alone. My father worked in that graveyard his whole life. It's only right that I bury him there — with my own hands."

That night, under a pale half-moon, Rifat stood alone in the graveyard — shovel in hand — ready to bury his father where the dead whispered and the earth still remembered.

But before he could lay his father to rest, something darker stirred inside him. The thought came quietly, like a whisper in the back of his mind. The gold... there's still more. His eyes drifted toward Eliza's grave. Rifat exhaled slowly. "I'll bury Father later," he muttered to himself. "He'll understand. I need the gold now. This could change everything."

He dropped his father's shovel beside the empty grave and made his way through the rows of tombstones. When he reached Eliza's resting place, he didn't hesitate. He started digging. The soil was soft. His shovel struck bone — a dull clack that echoed through the night. He frowned, brushed away the dirt, and froze. A skull. Then another. And another. There were dozens of them — men, women, maybe even children. Eliza's grave wasn't a grave at all; it was a pit of forgotten souls.

Rifat's hands trembled. "What... what is this place?" he whispered. But even as fear clawed at him, his ambition pressed harder. "No. The gold has to be here." He kept digging. The deeper he went, the darker the soil became, until it felt wet, like blood-soaked clay.

Then — Crack. The sound came from below — sharp, sudden, and unmistakably from the ground. Rifat's heart skipped a beat. He froze, the shovel in midair. For a moment, he thought about stopping. But then he remembered Subha's wedding — how everyone would look at him with pity, how poor Rifat never amounted to anything. "No," he muttered. "Not again." He dug faster. Harder. Until the ground seemed to pulse under his hands.

And then — it happened. A hand — pale, thin, and cold as the dead — shot up from the soil and clamped around his wrist. Rifat screamed and stumbled backward, dropping the shovel. The ground trembled. The soil split open like a wound.

From beneath, a figure rose — draped in tattered remains of armor and dirt-stained cloth. Its eyes glowed faintly, burning with something between rage and recognition. It smiled — a crooked, horrifying grin that made Rifat's blood run cold.

"I finally found you," the thing said, its voice like gravel and echo. "Or should I say... you finally found me."

[End of Chapter 4, Part I]

Chapter 4 (continued)

The Man Who Mocked The Devil

Rifat stumbled backward, his heart pounding so violently it drowned out the wind. The thing — the man — stepped out of the grave, dragging behind him the stench of centuries. His armor was rusted, his cloak torn and caked in dirt. But his eyes — his eyes burned like molten gold, alive and ancient.

"Who... who are you?" Rifat gasped. The figure didn't answer. Instead, he reached forward, his hand like iron, and wrapped it around Rifat's throat. With inhuman strength, he lifted him off the ground, dragging him from the grave as if he weighed nothing. Rifat's vision blurred. His feet kicked against the air.

"I am King Garius," he said. "The one who has waited all this time to be resurrected."

He hurled Rifat aside. The young man hit the ground hard, coughing and gasping for air. King Garius stepped forward, towering over him. "It wasn't a coincidence that you found me, Rifat. I knew someone like you would be born — one day — in the future. A man just as corrupt as I once was. As violent. As hungry."

"The earth," Garius continued, his voice rising, "never learns to make good men. It only breeds ambition. And ambition, Rifat, is the seed of evil. Evil runs the world. Evil shapes it. Evil is what I am... and evil is what you are."

Rifat shook his head violently. "You're insane! I — I'm not like you!" "Oh, but you are." The king's laughter rolled through the graveyard, low and menacing. "Yes, my hands are stained with blood — but if you had the chance, you'd have done the same. As proof, look around you. You desecrated graves for gold. You played with

the dead. You sold your soul for treasure that doesn't even belong to you."

"In a sense," the king said, pacing around him, "you are forever doomed — like me. But unlike you, I am immortal. I have waited for centuries for someone to unearth my tomb. Someone to pick up that cursed skull and free me." He stopped and turned to Rifat, his gaze like fire. "And it was you — the most greedy, desperate man I've ever known."

Rifat's mouth quivered. "I don't understand... how are you still alive? You — you died centuries ago! How can you even speak my language?" The king's grin widened. "Language changes, Rifat. Evil does not. It adapts. It whispers. It finds new tongues to speak through. You hear me now because your soul already belongs to me."

Rifat stumbled to his feet, his voice echoing across the silent graveyard. "How is this possible?" he shouted. "How are you immortal? People are born, people live, people die — that's how the world works! You shouldn't even exist!"

King Garius smiled — the kind of smile that made the moon itself seem to retreat behind the clouds. "Well, you see, Rifat, peasants like you are born and peasants like you die. That is the order of your kind. But a king such as myself... I do not die. Death does not come for me."

He stepped closer, his boots sinking into the loose soil, the faint glow from his eyes illuminating his scarred face. "You see, one of my soldiers — Maruf — had a favorite little pet, didn't he? That fiery woman, Eliza." He almost spat the name. "She built herself a rebellion, gathered a few pitiful kings from across the lands, and dared to rise against me. And to my dismay... that little witch actually won."

"She slaughtered every one of my armies. Every soldier, every guard — even Maruf's dogs. And then she came for me. She stabbed me through the skull — right here." He tapped the scar running across his forehead. "My head split open, blood pouring down my face... and I laughed. I laughed so loud the walls trembled. The sight terrified them — Eliza, her men, her allies. They screamed that I was no man,

but a demon."

"They bound me in chains. Built a coffin. Buried me so deep that even the worms couldn't find me. Yes, I was frightened at first. But I knew. I knew that someday, someone like you would find me. A man with enough greed, enough darkness in his heart."

"They erased me from history, Rifat. They burned every trace of my existence. If they hadn't, you'd have grown up memorizing my name, worshipping my reign. I would have been a legend. But instead..." His voice lowered to a growl. "...they buried me with their own sins."

Rifat swallowed hard. "Okay... but some of what you're saying doesn't make sense. How could you have known what happened after you were buried? How could you know what Eliza or the others did after you were gone? That doesn't add up."

For a moment, silence filled the graveyard. Then Garius began to laugh. It wasn't the laughter of a man — it was something inhuman, guttural, echoing like thunder in an endless pit. He raised his hands toward the black sky.

"Hear me, oh Devil — my master!" he roared. "Hear me, for I have called you! I am back, and I am here to entertain you once more!"

The ground shuddered violently. Every candlelight from the nearby graves flickered and died. The night fell into total darkness — so absolute that Rifat couldn't even see his own hands. Then came the sound — a tearing, like the heavens themselves were being ripped open. Rifat looked up. The sky had split apart. From within the rift, something enormous began to descend — writhing, shifting, impossible to define. Its form bent the air around it, like reality itself was trying to reject its presence.

The thing looked down at Garius and began to laugh — a sound that wasn't laughter at all, but a chorus of screams twisted into one. And Rifat, frozen in horror, realized something unthinkable: this was not just a monster. It was the very thing that Garius had served all along.

The ground trembled beneath Rifat's feet as the sky split open like torn fabric. Darkness spilled out — thick, crawling, suffocating. From the rift above, something enormous began to descend — a creature without form, yet heavier than any shadow. It had eyes, if they could be called that, swirling like molten obsidian. The air bent around it. The night bent around it.

Rifat's mind screamed one word: Run. He did. He sprinted as fast as he could — through fog, through dirt, through the same broken gravestones. But no matter where he turned, he found himself running past King Garius again and again, circling the same spot like a trapped moth around a dying flame. Panic clawed through his lungs. There was no escape.

"Do you now see the power of a king?" Garius thundered. "Do you see how helpless you are? You are nothing but a pawn in my story!"

Rifat dropped to his knees, clutching his head. The world was spinning — the laughter of the entity, the taunts of the immortal king — all blending into one nightmare symphony. He could barely breathe.

But then... a thought cut through the noise. If Garius was once human — if he could bleed, feel fear, be buried — then he was no god. He was just another man who wanted too much. And if Rifat shared that same greed... maybe he could use it against him.

He took a long, trembling breath. His heart slowed. He remembered something from a time when the world still made sense — a lesson, a joke, a bit of human logic. And with a grin crawling back to his lips, Rifat looked up.

"You know," he said, his voice steady now, "for a king, you really have the IQ of a dog."

Garius froze. "What did you say to me?" "I said," Rifat smirked, "you're an idiot." The king's eyes blazed crimson. "How dare you mock me! I have lived ten thousand lifetimes! You're a child in comparison!"

"Yeah, maybe," Rifat said. "But I went to university. My grades were pretty high. And I can recognize an idiot when I see one — especially one who probably got his job through referrals." "Referrals?" Garius repeated, confused. "What do you mean? Job? What nonsense—"

"Oh, you wouldn't understand," Rifat interrupted, standing tall now. "You cheated your way through life. You served this... thing." He gestured — but didn't dare look — toward the monstrous entity hovering above them. "You've been entertaining it for centuries like some cosmic clown. You're not a king, Garius. You're just a side character in someone else's video game."

Rifat finally forced himself to look up. His eyes met the swirling gaze of the creature above — an impossible act of courage and terror fused together. His entire body trembled, but his voice did not. "You," Rifat shouted at the entity. "You want entertainment, don't you? You've been watching this idiot dig in the mud for centuries. Is that fun for you? Really? He's boring. He's predictable. He's old news."

The sky rumbled, low and amused — the sound of thunder shaped like laughter. "You want a story worth watching?" Rifat went on. "Then end this one. You know how every story truly becomes great? When it ends. So let me end it. Let me end him. Let me be your new piece. Let me be the one who entertains you."

The ground shook. The creature's laughter deepened until the whole world quivered like glass. Garius suddenly gasped — his body cracking, flesh peeling like paper. He fell to his knees, eyes wide with terror. "No... no! My lord, not me! I've served you—" His scream turned into a wet gargle. His power was gone.

Rifat smiled. "Guess even kings get fired sometimes."

He reached for the chainsaw — the same one he'd used earlier to cut down a tree. He pulled the cord. The machine roared to life, its metal teeth glinting in the unholy light. Garius crawled backward. "Please! Rifat! I'll serve you! I'll be your slave—"

"Kill you?" Rifat repeated, stepping closer. "I thought kings don't die." "Please! I—" Rifat tilted his head, eyes sharp as glass. "You called me greedy. Maybe I am not.

There's one difference between us, you little piece of shit."

He raised the chainsaw, its growl rising like a scream. "You're greedy... but I'm ambitious." The blade came down in a flash of red and steel. The king's head rolled onto the earth — crownless, powerless, silent.

The laughter above faded into the distance, like thunder receding beyond the clouds. The darkness peeled away. Dawn crept slowly over the graves. Rifat stood there, shaking, covered in blood and dirt, breathing like a man who'd just wrestled the devil and lived to tell the tale.

He looked at the severed head one last time and whispered: *"Long live the king. Eat shit, you disgusting over expired dog."*

[End of Chapter 4]

Chapter 5

Devil In The Form Of A Bastard

The entity was gone. The graveyard, once split by shadows and screams, slowly began to mend itself. The air turned still again. The whispering wind quieted. The graves looked ordinary — just soil, stone, and silence.

Rifat stood in the center of it all, staring at the place where the monster had vanished. The sky above him was clear, as if nothing had ever happened. He didn't speak. He simply knelt down beside his father's body and began to dig.

No demons. No kings. No voices from the ground — only the sound of his shovel cutting through the cold earth. He buried his father with care, then buried the remains of King Garius right beside him, in the very same spot where he had first found him. It took him the whole night.

When he finally finished, dawn broke over the horizon. Rifat's hands were blistered, his clothes soaked in dirt and sweat. He walked home without a word, stepped into the shower, and let the water wash the blood and soil off his body. For the first time in days, he looked at himself in the mirror.

He stared at the reflection — the tired eyes, the trembling fingers, the hollow breath. Then he said quietly to himself, "All of this... it's enough to change a man. Enough to forget greed. Enough to forget everything." He paused. His reflection smirked back at him. "But there's one problem. I'm ambitious. And I'm still alive."

He turned around — His office was filled with gold. Stacks upon stacks of gold bars and ancient ornaments shimmered under the faint light. Gold that came from the grave of a king... and the soldiers buried beside him. The riches of centuries were

now his. Rifat didn't scream. He didn't even smile. He simply walked forward, ran his hand over the treasure, and sighed.

He had killed a monster. But somewhere inside him, another monster had taken root — one that breathed ambition, and a hunger far colder than Garius ever possessed. Whether that monster was good or evil, no one could say. Perhaps it was simply human.

Days turned into weeks. Weeks into months. Rifat's name began to echo through the city. His business grew faster than anyone could imagine. Factories, showrooms, offices — all under his name. He became one of the richest men in the country, and with wealth came influence, fame, and power.

One afternoon, dressed in a tailored suit and wearing a quiet smile, Rifat drove to Subha's house. The same Subha who once refused him — the girl he had watched from afar while dreaming of something more. When she opened the door, she smiled softly and said, "Why is a famous, wealthy, and handsome man at my doorstep?"

Rifat chuckled. "Well," he said, "I realized it was time I settled down. And with all this money and fame, I could have anyone I want. But the truth is... the only girl I ever wanted was you. If you'll have me, we can get married right now. Move to another country. Go anywhere you wish. Whatever you desire — I'll give it to you." Subha blushed and laughed. Perhaps it was love, or perhaps it was the gleam of wealth in his eyes — but she said yes.

They married soon after. A grand ceremony. Expensive lights. The whole city came to see the man who turned rags into gold. That night, Rifat stood alone in front of a mirror once again. He looked at his reflection in his wedding suit and began to laugh.

It was a strange laugh — neither joyous nor sad, not human nor monstrous. It was the sound of someone who had seen the edge of darkness and decided to live with it. Was it the laugh of a man who had conquered evil? Or the laugh of a man who had

become it? No one could tell. No one ever would.

Some questions are beyond answers. Was it right to buy love with money? Is that truly how the world works? Perhaps not. But one truth remained — The wealthy have ways to cheat life. And sometimes, that's all it takes to win.

[The End]

■■ Book III of III ■■

Rainbow Girl

Order of Decay

By Reyhan Onto

A Cosmic Horror Story

When a person dies, it happens in stages. First, the heart, that tireless drum, falters. The blood, once warm, turns sluggish. And the brain — my sister's brain — ceased its quiet orchestra of thought and memory. I stood at the foot of those stairs in Ravens, a country where atheism was the only religion, and death was an endless, dark horizon. My sister, Lila — everyone called her Rainbow Girl — fell while playing with her dolls. She slipped on the third step, tumbled, and when I reached her, her tiny hand was already cooling. She was twelve, and everyone in Ravens adored her for that pure kindness that seemed to radiate from her. That's why they gave her the nickname "Rainbow Girl."

I was almost thirty, but as they spoke of burial, of letting her go, I refused. In a land like Ravens — where faith was never language — I decided I would reverse-engineer death. I would decode the silent language of decay, dissect each moment of dissolution, and bring her back. I didn't know how, but every step on this path through Ravens would be a step toward defying the void.

Mr. Alistair — Rafael's butler — placed a silver tray on the kitchen table. The aroma of warm broth and bread filled the air, but I didn't reach for it. Instead, I stared out the window, the gray skyline of Ravens pressing down like a weight.

"Master Raphael," Mr. Alistair said, his voice soft but edged with caution, "are you truly sure this is the right path? Your father always dreamed you would become a doctor, to heal in ways that don't betray nature."

I closed my eyes, the weight of his words pressing on me, but then I shook my head. "You don't get it, do you?" I said, my voice low, almost a whisper. "Death is the only thing we, humanoids, are utterly vulnerable to. We have no idea why it happens, no way to control it, no map. But Lila — my sister — just died. And I swear to you, her body is still whole, still perfect. I have only a few hours. After that, the organs, the cells — they will rot, and all hope will slip away."

Mr. Alistair bowed his head, silent, and for a moment, the room felt as fragile as a heartbeat. And so, with each ticking second, I rose from that table, determined that I would not let death have the last word.

Eventually, the cells begin to break down, and the entire body decays, but this chain — brain, heart, liver, kidneys — usually marks the first steps of that inevitable decline.

The clock was ticking in the dim basement lab. I knelt beside Lila's small, pale body, my hands trembling as I unfastened the bracelet from her wrist — a bracelet she used to twirl between her fingers when she smiled. Time was slipping, and I could feel it in my bones — like the liver inside her cooling, beginning its slow collapse. I couldn't let it go. I lifted her, wrapped in a linen cloth, and carried her to the cold storage unit in the corner. The freezer whirred as I laid her down, the chill already beginning to halt the rot, if only for a few hours.

But as I stepped away, Alistair reappeared, his brow creased, his voice heavy with worry. "Master Raphael, if you truly think about this — if it is even possible — should you not consider that your father's dream, the one of healing, was never about defying death? Perhaps there are some boundaries we should not cross."

I turned to him, a weight heavier than the frost settling in my chest. "No," I said, my voice breaking. "You don't understand. I can't bury her, not yet. I can't let this be the end."

I sat down on the cold metal stool, my breath fogging in the dim air as I reached for Lila's hand. I had only taken a short break, but when I opened the freezer, the frost bit at my fingertips. And as I ran a hand over her abdomen, I saw it — the liver, once a strong beacon in her tiny body, had softened, was turning to a mushy ruin. If I tried now, if I forced the spark of life back into her, her body would never hold. I was out of time, out of options.

I stood abruptly, my voice sharp, cutting through the cold. "Alistair, I need you to find me a liver. Call every hospital nearby — any source, anyone who might have a

donor. I don't care if it's impossible; I will offer them a million dollars if I have to."

Alistair hesitated, his fingers tightening around the phone. "Master, this is not just a matter of money. People don't give up their children's organs lightly. There's a moral line here." "I don't care about moral lines," I spat, each word heavy with grief. "This is my sister. Call them. I will not let her vanish because I was too late, too afraid, or too cautious."

Hours later, the door creaked open, and Alistair returned, a small package in his hand. It was a liver, harvested from a young donor just hours ago, preserved in a cold gel. I couldn't suppress a tight, sick smile — not happiness, but the sharp edge of obsession. I set the liver aside, prepared everything, and slowly began the incision. Alistair watched me, his eyes flickering with unease as I sutured the new organ into place.

But as time ticked on, his gaze sharpened, and he stepped closer, a whisper in his voice. "Raphael, you did replace the abdomen, but look closely — if the brain is gone, if the maggots have started, if it is decaying as fast as you fear — then no matter how perfect this liver is, the brain is the command center. Without it, there is no life."

I froze, fingers hovering over the sutures, but still, I shook my head. "Don't worry, Alistair. I'll figure it out. I'll find another approach, another way. After all, I'm one of the best medical professionals in Ravens. I won't fail her — not now."

As I carefully adjusted the sutures, Alistair stepped closer, his gaze distant. "You know, Raphael," he said softly, "you're the spitting image of your father. I saw you just now, in the way you moved, so determined — so like him when I first met him." I paused, a bitter laugh escaping before I could stop it.

"You know," I said, my voice rough, "when my father was younger, and you started serving him, I was just a boy. Now, look at me — I'm almost thirty. And you, Alistair — you really haven't aged a day, have you? How do you do it? How do you stay so stress-free in a world where depression and anxiety are always waiting to

swallow you whole?"

He smiled faintly, but there was a shadow behind it, a weight he'd carried since he was a boy. "I don't have the answers, Raphael. I just keep going. But you — you're playing with the edges of life and death, and I fear, if you cross them, you may lose yourself."

We worked in a heavy, suffocating silence, until Alistair's voice broke it. "Raphael," he whispered, his eyes darting to the freezer, "the liver — it's rotting faster than we thought. You have to stop this before it all collapses." I clenched my fists, forcing down the panic, and said, "Alistair, find me another donor. A liver — no matter what it costs, one million, two million — I don't care. I need it to work."

Alistair hesitated, his fingers tightening on the surgical tray. "Master Raphael, it's worth nothing — you've only been at this for a few hours. If you cannot reverse-engineer this damage within a day, the brain — if it begins to fail — you won't bring her back. Raphael, you're literally playing with the impossible. As humanoids, we are programmed to die."

I spun around, my anger flaring as I jabbed a finger in his direction. "Just because you look young, Alistair, doesn't mean you can dismiss everything I'm doing! I give the orders, and you do what I say. Now, call the hospitals. I will not be stopped."

The new liver was inside her. My hands were steady while I stitched her back together, but my mind wasn't. Every stitch felt like I was trying to sew time itself — trying to close something that should never have been opened. But even as I stepped back, something felt wrong. Not outside. Inside my head. Inside hers.

"The brain..." Alistair said quietly behind me. I didn't answer. Because I was already thinking about it. The brain doesn't die all at once. It dies slowly. First, it loses oxygen. Then the cells begin to panic. Then they start to break — one by one — like lights turning off in a city. Memory goes first. Then understanding. Then everything.

I walked away from the table. I couldn't look at her face anymore. Because a question had started growing inside me: If I bring her back... who will come back? "We can't stop now, Alistair," I said. My voice sounded empty. "There has to be a way." "There isn't," he replied. "You're trying to fix something that isn't broken. Death is not a mistake." I let out a small laugh. "Of course it is."

I went to my father's study. Dust. Silence. Old books that smelled like forgotten time. But I wasn't looking for knowledge. I was looking for hope. Or maybe an excuse. Then I saw it. A small glass jar. Inside it — a dead flower. Black. Not dark red. Not purple. Black. Like it had swallowed all light.

The Poisoned Lotus. As a child, I was told stories about it. They said insects would carry pieces of that flower to their dead. And for a few moments — the dead would move again. Not alive. Not really. Just moving. Like something was trying to come back but couldn't. I used to think it was just a story. A cruel one. But now — now it made sense. "It's not magic," I whispered. "It's chemistry."

I spent hours studying it. Breaking it down. Trying to understand what it actually did. And slowly — it became clear. The flower had two effects. Simple but terrifying. First — it sends a signal to the brain. A very strong one. Like a final scream. Even after death, it forces the brain to fire one last time. That's why the body moves. That's why the eyes open. That's why it feels real. Second — it slows down decay. Just for a little while. It protects the cells. Keeps them from breaking too fast. Like putting a pause button on death.

But there's a problem. A big one. The brain is not just electricity. It's an order. Structure. Memory. Identity. The flower creates noise. Too much noise. Like a thousand voices screaming at once. There's movement — but no person. "That's why it doesn't work," I said. "They move... but they're not there."

Then I realized something. Something that made my heart beat faster. What if I guide it? I looked at my own hands. My blood — XZ positive. My body. I shared half of my genes with her. Half of me was her. So I created something new.

Something unnatural. I took my blood and extracted tiny particles — exosomes — the things the body uses to send messages between cells. Think of them like delivery boxes.

Then I filled those boxes with two things: First — a synthesized copy of the flower's neurosteroid analogue. The thing that forces the brain to wake up. Second — something I made myself. A custom antisense oligonucleotide. A small piece of biological code. Its job was simple: to calm the chaos. To reduce the noise. To force the brain to follow a pattern. Not perfect. But better than madness.

"It won't bring her memories back," I said to myself. "But maybe — it will bring her back." I held the liquid in my hand. It was glowing faint blue. Beautiful. Terrifying. At that moment, the door opened. Alistair stood there. His face looked different. Older. Tired. "Master Raphael," he said softly. "The donor liver — it's here."

I took the package from him without a word. The liver I'd already implanted was failing. Rotting faster than I'd predicted. This new one — harvested just hours ago from a young victim of a car accident — was my second chance. My only chance. I worked quickly. Removing the failing organ. Preparing the new one. Suturing it into place with the precision of a man who had nothing left but precision. Alistair watched in silence, his ageless face unreadable.

When it was done, I stepped back. The new liver was perfect. Healthy. Alive. But Lila remained still. I looked at the vial in my hand. The blue liquid. My hybrid of flower and science. My key. I walked to her side. Pressed the syringe gently against her neck. The carotid artery — the fastest path to the brain. I injected it. I turned around. Nothing happened. Seconds passed. A minute.

Then — a sound. Soft. Wet. Wrong. I turned. Her hand — it moved. "Lila...?" I whispered. Her eyes opened. But they weren't right. They were unfocused. Lost. Like she was looking through the world instead of at it. Then she looked at me. And for a second — just one second — she saw me.

"Brother...?" she said. Her voice was dry. Broken.

My heart stopped. "I'm here," I said quickly. "I'm right here—" She cried out. Her face twisted in pain. "Why does it hurt so bad... Please just end me again?" And just like that — it was gone. Her eyes rolled back. Her body went still. Blood started coming out of her nose. Dark. Almost black.

Silence. Again. I stood there. Not moving. Not breathing. It worked. For a moment — it worked. And that was enough. Because now — I knew. Death is not a wall. It's a door. And I just found the key. But the door didn't open fully. So now — I have to break it down.

The weight of her body still pressed on me, but now, like a slow poison, something else pressed inside my head. I looked at Lila's still form, and a creeping dread sank into my chest. The damage wasn't just in her liver — it was in her brain. The maggots, unseen, were already feasting inside her skull, and the brain couldn't be saved. If I didn't act, she would be gone forever.

Alistair returned, his face as calm as ever, but a chill ran down my spine. I gave the order again — "Find me a healthy brain, the exact age Lila is now. Don't think; just do it." And he walked away, but this time, something was off. A smile — cold, slow — formed at the corners of his lips. And for a second, I felt fear grip me — because he wasn't just calm; he was too calm.

I sank into a chair, and the dread grew heavier. How was he getting these organs so fast? My bank didn't send out any payments; I hadn't seen wires move. And yet, every time I ordered, he was back within minutes — like a shadow, like a ghost moving faster than reality.

Then, something even worse crossed my mind. I was almost frozen as I opened the family memory book. There it was — a picture of Alistair, right there beside my parents, when they were all twenty years old — the exact age I was now. My stomach twisted because Alistair still looks exactly the same even after all these years.

I rushed to the computer, my hands shaking, and opened the employee records. The screen stared back at me with a cold fact — Alistair had died in that car crash alongside my parents twelve years ago. The world stopped. The man I had been trusting, the one who found every organ, every answer — he didn't survive. So, now, I sat there, paralyzed. Was I dreaming of him? Was this some glitch, some trick of the mind, like a broken circuit? How could he still be here, when he was supposed to be gone?

And as I stared, I realized — maybe this wasn't just about Lila. Maybe I wasn't just trying to bring her back. Maybe I was grasping at a father I'd lost long ago — or maybe a part of me that never really grew up at all.

Before Alistair returned with a healthy brain, I sat in the lab, my mind racing. I tried to copy the pattern of her infected brain, to map it somehow — like a digital echo. I thought, if I could just transfer the essence of who she was into this new brain, maybe something would survive. But every time I tried, the chaos of her broken brain slipped through my fingers, like sand.

Within a minute, Alistair returned, holding a small, cold package in his hands — this time, a healthy brain. Something inside me sparked — hope, maybe, or just a terrible resolve. I knew the mistake had been that the maggots had devoured her brain, and this time, with a healthy one, maybe, just maybe, something could spark.

I gave the order. The scalpel moved again. I implanted the brain, my heart pounding, and then, I injected the vial once more. But as the liquid coursed through her, something horrible happened. One of her eyes suddenly bulged out, and a thin stream of dark blood ran from her socket. I stepped back, paralyzed by fear, but then she moved — she stood, rising up in front of me. My chest tightened, and I stepped closer, barely daring to ask.

"Lila... Rainbow Girl... are you truly here?" I whispered, the darkness settling in around me.

Alistair started laughing — sharp, bitter, and cold. "You little copy of a monkey," he sneered. "You actually did it. You brought someone back to life. I thought the humanoids from the planet Mars were the weakest versions I'd ever seen, but you — you surpassed them all."

I was stunned. I whispered, "Mars? What are you talking about? This is planet A0." Alistair grinned darkly. "Oh, you haven't figured it out. Of course you haven't. You see, you humanoids are just copies — cheap imitations of the perfect race called humans. You never realized it, but you're worse than them."

"In the future, there will be a planet called Earth where these humans will grow in numbers, and near the end times of Earth, they started human cloning. I had a plan. I brought two of these so-called humanoids with me back to the past, to a time when this planet had enough to sustain life. After I left the two in Mars, they started mating like monkeys, and in a few hundred years, this planet was filled with you humanoids. It's disgusting how both humans and humanoids are both designed just to pass on their genes. 'The most intelligent creations of the creator,' my foot."

I couldn't move. My mind spun. And before I could even ask another question, Alistair said, "You actually did your research. You helped me reach my goal. So now, I'll let you be. Take this vial of immortality, sell it, and live out your life."

And with that, he turned, and Lila, still moving like a shadow beside him, walked toward the door. I ran after them, calling, "Alistair, who are you?" But he didn't turn. He just kept walking, and I suddenly realized something was wrong. I thought of him all these years — just a man by my side — but now he was something else. He stepped back and said, "Over time, I had many names. Some called me Satan. Others called me Lucifer. Some called me Shaitan." Then, as he crossed the door, he said, "Now it's time for me to go back to the future, to finish what I began."

I was left in silence, as never before in the history of Planet A0 — no, in the entire history of the humanoids — had anyone seen this. And as they vanished through the door, I ran after them, desperate, but when I reached it — there was nothing. Just

emptiness, like a door to nowhere, and I was left alone with a silence that would never end.

After that night, Rafael couldn't make sense of what happened. His mind fractured, and instead of grieving, he clung to his research like a lifeline. He believed he had stumbled onto the cure for mortality itself. So he took his work and went to a hospital, stood before a live audience, and in that moment — he brought a dead person back to life.

The world exploded. Especially on Mars, where everyone dreamed of immortality. Everyone wanted the vial, but it was worth a fortune. In a few years, Rafael was no longer just a doctor — he was a target. He was kidnapped, taken, and tortured by shadowy figures who forced him to perfect the vial, to perfect his research. Day after day, he was broken down — until he lost himself completely.

And as his mind shattered, so did the world. Nations on Mars went to war, all desperate for that vial. The thirst for immortality drove them mad. And in their madness, they reached for nuclear weapons. In the end, all life on Mars was erased — just a dead world, hollowed out by greed.

"Rafael destroyed his own race. For these humanoids, there is no afterlife. When they close their eyes, there is nothing — no heaven, no hell. They are lost forever."

Satan hovered over the barren surface of Mars, his voice like a whip cracking through the cold air. "You all ran after greed. You fought for kings, but the kings never cared for you. Now there is nothing left of you. No kings, no saviors — WHO IS YOUR KING NOW?" His gaze swept across the dead planet, then he turned to Rainbow Girl.

"My dear, throughout my time on Earth, I helped many humans rise. They sang, they danced, they became leaders — worshipped as gods. Imagine what they would do if they saw you — something dark, something magical. They would call you a savior."

"Anything you order me to do I shall make it a reality," said the Rainbow Girl.

He smiled darkly, then placed a hand on her shoulder. "We have work to do. I will take you to the future. Humans, through all time, have always needed a spark. They followed them — sang, prayed, built empires. I gave them that spark, guided them into darkness. And if you step into their future, they will worship you —"

He paused, letting the words hang in the dead air of a ruined world.

"But you won't be just another messiah...

You will be their false messiah."

[The End]

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